Met Office

NEWS

Adverse Weather-Health Alerting system updated

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The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is today updating its Adverse Weather Alerting service for England which it runs in partnership with the Met Office.

The improved system will continue to focus specifically on the health impacts of extreme weather in England on the health of the population but is now a colour coded, impact-based service. It is mainly aimed at health professionals and those with long-term health conditions such as heart conditions.

Heat-Health Alerts and Cold-Health Alerts are part of the Weather-Health Alerting system, Heat Health Alerts (HHA) run from 1 June to 30 Sept. Heat

HHA will be sent directly to social and healthcare services in England, organisations such as Age UK, and appear on a new dedicated website. They will give advanced warning of any adverse weather conditions that could have a significant effect on health and well-being, enabling health care professionals to prepare and the public to take extra precautions to keep safe and well. The HHA's will run alongside the Met Office Extreme Heat National Severe Weather Warning Service. Although the two services have a different focus, they will work together to highlight all potential impacts from extreme heat.

Will Lang, Head of Situational Awareness at the Met Office, said: "We are looking forward to working even more closely with UKHSA following the changes to the heat-health alerting system, building on the work we have already been doing together. The effects of human-induced climate change are already being felt on UK's summer with an increase in the frequency, duration, and intensity of extreme heat events over recent decades and temperatures in excess of 40C recorded for the first-time last summer."

"The updated health alerts will be complementary to and run alongside our UK wide National Severe Weather Warnings and will play a pivotal role in helping save lives, protect property and the economy as we all work to tackle adverse weather and climate change going forward. It is only by working in close partnerships with organisations like UKHSA that effective action can be taken when it matters."

The **England only** service will no longer be numbered e.g., Level 2 or Level 3 etc, but will be referred to by colour e.g., yellow, amber, or red. During the core alerting season, 1 June to 30 September, UKHSA and the Met Office will jointly monitor the weather forecasts and when episodes of hot weather are identified UKHSA and the Met Office will undertake a combined risk assessment to determine the expected impacts and the likelihood of those impacts occurring, and the appropriate alert issued. The new website will not only include the current alert status for all regions of England but when an alert has been issued will also include the following information:

- Headline weather conditions expected in the coming days
- An outline of what impacts might be expected
- A brief overview of the regional impact assessment
- Links to additional information, advice and guidance

Dr Agostinho Sousa, Head of Extreme Events and Health Protection at the UK Health Security Agency, said: “Our heat-health alerting system plays a vital role in notifying professionals and the public of forecasted high temperatures that can affect the health of those most at risk, particularly individuals over the age of 65 and those with pre-existing health conditions. Last year saw record high temperatures across England and evidence shows that heatwaves are likely to occur more often, be more intense and last longer in the years and decades ahead. It is important we are able to quantify the likely impacts of these heatwaves before they arrive to prevent illness and reduce the number of deaths.

“We look forward to collaborating with the Met Office to provide evidence-based advice to professionals and the public, to ensure they are well-equipped to respond to these events.”

UKHSA have been working with the Met Office since the summer of 2021 and changes to the alerting system will ensure the two warning services are more closely aligned and are complimentary to each other. UKHSA’s service will issue yellow to red alerts while the National Severe Weather Warning Service will continue to issue amber and red alerts for extreme heat, this is because the health sector, the primary target of UKHSA’s alerts, is likely to observe impacts before other sectors.

The four UKHSA alerts are as follows:

- **Green (preparedness):** No alert will be issued as the conditions are likely to have minimal impact and health; business as usual and summer/winter planning and preparedness activities.
- **Yellow (response):** These alerts cover a range of situations. Yellow alerts may be issued during periods of heat/cold which would be unlikely to impact most people but could impact those who are particularly vulnerable.
- **Amber (enhanced response):** An amber alert indicates that weather impacts are likely to be felt across the whole health service, and at this level we may begin to see some health impacts across the wider population, not just the most vulnerable. Non-health sectors may also start to observe impacts and a more significant coordinated response may be required.
- **Red (emergency response):** A red alert indicates significant risk to life for even the healthy population. Severe impacts would be expected across all sectors with a coordinated response essential.

Access a full user guide on the weather health alerting system can be found here.

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